Mapping Utopia: Cartography and Social Reform in 19th Century Australia

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> All utopias require mapping, their social order depends upon and generates a spatial order which reorganises and improves upon existing models (Cosgrove 1999: 15–16).

This article examines the close relationship between cartography, utopianism and colonial dispossession in 19th century Australia. Critical geographers such as J. B. Harley[1] have transformed our understanding in the last twenty years of the relationship between maps, knowledge and power, drawing attention to the role of maps in the expansion of empires, in preparing the colonists' symbolic appropriation of land, before the explorers had ever trodden the ground. In the case of the writers studied in this article—Thomas J. Maslen (1787–1856) and James Vetch (1789–1869)—their cartography was a tool to appropriate the 'empy continent' of Australia by projecting onto it utopian social and political solutions to problems at home. In constructing their utopias, they drew on a range of resources : maps, grid patterns, nomenclature, iconography and mathematical formulae in order to achieve the ideal divisions of territory and distribution of land that would realise their quest to establish a 'new Britain.' After a brief discussion of the influential work of Edward Gibbon Wakefield (1796–1862), who described the ideal division and distribution of land by applying economic theory and mathematical formulae, the article will focus on two examples of the exercise of utopian thinking through cartography, in the work of Maslen and Vetch.

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[1] A number of his most important articles, including 'Maps, Knowledge, and Power,' are collected in Harley (2001).

These three writers are of particular interest for a number of reasons: their projects were devised almost contemporaneously, in the late 1820s, when large parts of the Australian continent were still unexplored by Europeans; their maps were not however presented as imaginary or fictional, they were speculative certainly, but 'speculative geography' was sanctioned by the Royal Geographical Society, founded in 1831, as a means of exciting curiosity and stimulating inquiry, so long as the theories put forward were 'supported by reasonable probabilities' (Prospectus, RGS 1831: vii). The authors we study here believed that they had a sound, rational basis for their speculations; they drew on the full resources of the scientific, geographical and cartographical knowledge of the time to draw up their maps of Australia and their projects for reform. As we shall see, however, they did not escape the assumptions, ethnocentrism and the illusions that marked the European mindset of the colonial era at this time of transition to a new form of imperialism. The 1830s can be considered, argues John Darwin, as the 'crucial decade' in the transformation of the British Empire 'from a straggling mercantile empire into a world system'; Wakefield, Maslen and Vetch are at the forefront of the ideological developments that accompanied the 'spectacular expansion of this entrepôt empire into a world system in the making' (Darwin 2002: 45).

The early explorers of the continent had viewed and described the country through the mental grid of the landmarks and topographical references of their countries of origin, and according to what they were expecting or hoping to find. As Geoff King writes: 'the early maps and journals were filled with misnomers: 'meadows' and 'mountains' that owed little in appearance to what usually went by the names, but that provided a form of spatial punctuation' (King 1996: 62). The significance of such practices goes far beyond the misleading naming of features: mapping and naming was also a tool of possession and dispossession. One of the founding objectives of the Royal Geographical Society, which became the principal body initiating, funding and disseminating the work of exploration in the colonies, was to establish a geographical nomenclature, 'a more uniform and precise orthography' which arguably came to be used as an instrument of the imperial appropriation of space, as much as a tool of science (Prospectus, RGS 1831: vii–xii). The delineation of space, the drawing of frontiers, the description of land, were designed to support English pastoral, agricultural, mining practices and interests,

as the drawing of Goyder's line illustrates.[2] The surveyors,[3] cartographers, engineers and explorers who gradually extended their activities across the continent were 'buttressing the claims of effective and moral proprietorship by demonstrating to the colonists and the outside world that they had conquered the landscape' (Day 2005: 141).

The issue of place names was no less significant in the process of possession and dispossession. On the one hand it might appear that giving European-derived names—of famous people, explorers, places from the mother country—must signify the most total form of dispossession, since such practices over-wrote and erased the aboriginal presence. On the other hand, David Day argues that the use of traditional names did not necessarily indicate any greater respect for the rights and prior occupancy of the land by the aborigines. Their use might be a means to remove from the map the traces of previous explorers; it could also have a practical purpose, to allow easier verification and identification of landmarks 'so long as any Aborigines can be found in the neighbourhood' (143). The process of naming (in this context) is itself utopian: in the first place, it attributes to the mapmakers and explorers the right to name, and thus to create, as Cresswell (2004) terms it, 'place' out of space;[4] it participates in the creation of an ideal place, rendering it coherent and rational, since names are selected through the exercise of reason; it creates an idealised relationship between the original and the new, the past and the present (the natives and the colonisers) by supposing a peaceful transition from an inferior, irrational stage to the next, superior stage, of human occupation.

These issues: the naming of places, the (often conjectural) identification of topographical features, the rational division of land, are central to the exercises in mapping and to the symbolic appropriation of space to which our writers devoted themselves. An integral tool in the ideological realisation of possession and dispossession, the 'practical utopias' proposed by our authors could perhaps only be envisaged on the 'blank page' that was Australia in the European imagination of this

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[2] Goyder's line, drawn across the map of South Australia in 1865 to indicate the limit of the area suitable for agriculture, is an example of division with a view to English pastoral practice.
[3] Norman Etherington cites examples of the hostility with which surveyors were met by colonised peoples in New Zealand, Australia and South Africa (Etherington 2007: 3–4).
[4] 'by the act of place-naming, space is transformed symbolically into a place, that is, a space with history' (Carter 1987: xxiv).

period, and on the 'waste land' that defined its legal status.[5] It is all the more significant that none of our three writers had ever been to Australia when they drew up their maps and projects; their knowledge was based entirely on second-hand accounts or on extrapolation from their experiences in other countries.

Of the three writers, Wakefield was the first to publish his proposals and by far the most influential. Wakefield's first major venture into the field of colonial reform was his *Letter from Sydney* (1829)—written in fact while he was a prisoner in Newgate, serving a three year sentence for the abduction of a schoolgirl heiress, and first published, for this reason, under the name of another colonial reformer, Robert Gouger. The *Letter from Sydney*, which received considerable public attention and critical acclaim, has generally been remembered as the first exposition of Wakefield's theory of 'systematic colonisation,' a theory that he developed over the following twenty years and that rests on three principles: land sales controlled by the authorities for a 'sufficient price'; the proceeds of the sale to be used to support selected immigration; the prospect of self-government. Wakefield's system would later be put into practice in colonies in Australasia and Canada, with varying degrees of faithfulness to his doctrines, and varying degrees of success. But whatever his responsibility in their success or failure, there can be no doubting the extent of his influence (even if he often had to operate behind the scenes, because of his dubious reputation) as he persuaded colonial officials, government ministers, governors and political economists to adopt his ideas. He was a highly influential member of a generation of colonial reformers, including Bentham and John Stuart Mill, that sought to overturn the prevailing orthodoxy of the 1820s, which held that colonies were an expensive burden on the mother-country, that further colonial development should be discouraged, and that the independence of the colonies might be envisioned with equanimity (Mills 1915: 19–22).

We have discussed elsewhere the kind of society that *Letter from Sydney* envisaged for Australia, a vision that sought certainly to eliminate from the continent the excessive poverty of the mother country but nevertheless to reproduce a class-based society that would protect the landed gentry to which Wakefield aspired (Graves & Rechniewski

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[5] Simon Ryan emphasises the political agenda behind the cartographic process: 'I have argued that maps have played a significant role in the visual production of the continent as a *tabula rasa*, and that the cartographic emptiness is not simply a display of geographical ignorance but has important political implications' (Ryan: 123).

2010–11: 39). It might be described as a nostalgic, rural vision, seeking to reproduce a way of life that was already threatened by the twin pressures of industrialisation and urbanisation in Britain.[6] Its realisation depended on achieving an ideal proportion of population to land, and an ideal distribution of population across the territory, which necessitated placing restrictions on the availability of land to new settlers. His system must be based, he argued, on the most precise calculation: the price of land must not be too high (which would discourage migration) nor too low (for this would allow settlers to acquire land too easily, thus reducing the available workforce), and it must moreover be sufficient to subsidise the continued migration of desirable, selected, free colonists. However as R.C. Mills argues: 'At this point the theory, consisting of the two doctrines of a sufficient price and the application of the whole of the proceeds to emigration completely breaks down. Its pretended character of mathematical precision, of scientific accuracy must be denied, and its claim to be self-regulatory dismissed' (Mills: 337).

Wakefield's work is significant in regard to this article because of the predictions he makes about geography, terrain and climate and his supposition that precise mathematical calculations can engineer a certain type of social relations. He supposes— like Maslen and Vetch after him—that the land will be productive and fertile, and the climate clement, and he discounts as irrelevant, and condemned to disappear, the native populations. Like his contemporaries, he assumes that Australia is a 'waste land,' a *tabula rasa*, waiting to be filled up by productive inhabitants. His *Letter from Sydney*, moreover, is cited by Maslen in his Appendix (with the author shown as Robert Gouger) as one of the books that he considers required reading for any expedition to explore Australia—thus are perpetuated and disseminated typical assumptions about the nature of the Australian terrain that characterise the work of Maslen and Vetch amongst others in this period.

Thomas J. Maslen was the author of *The Friend of Australia or A plan for Exploring the Interior and for Carrying on a Survey of the Whole Continent of Australia,* first published in London in 1830. This book of some 480 pages included a map, town-plans and the design for an Australian flag. Though his stated aim was to put forward a practical plan for exploring the interior of the continent, Maslen's cartography and

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[6] David Spurr (1993: 30) points out that the visions projected onto the colonised landscape may already have been outdated representations of the homeland.

iconography seek to imaginatively construct a society that would be an exemplary expression of the British race.

Maslen had retired from service with the East India Company in 1821 because of ill health and by the late 1820s was living in Yorkshire, which he describes at the end of the preface to *Friend of Australia* as the 'Siberian Wilds.' Missing the warm climate of India, he had asked the Army to pay his pension in Australia to enable him to emigrate there, but his request was declined. He compensated for this disappointment by reading everything he could on Australia and devising a detailed and ambitious plan for exploring the whole of the interior of the continent. The bulk of the chapters are devoted to laying out in extraordinary detail the equipment, planning and organisation necessary for a successful expedition, which he claimed would take no more than 14 years (Maslen 1836: 22).[7] He tells the reader that he had explored widely in India, taking less-travelled routes as he pursued his duties as a public servant; nothing however suggests that he had undertaken anything even approaching the ambitious expedition he outlines for Australia. The modern reader is bemused by the painstaking appraisals of, for example, the reasons why bullocks or camels are more suitable than horses; the necessity for light chainmail to guard against attacks by savages; the rotation of sentry duties etc. These details, and in particular the measures to be taken to defend the party against the natives, are a stark reminder of the link between colonial exploration, cartography and dispossession.[8]

Maslen advances in the opening pages a number of arguments in favour of exploring Australia, the last 'great blank in the map of the world' (1). There is the argument by science: it is in the interests of humanity to extend our knowledge of this 'most singular country,' its 'interesting topographical features,' its 'strange productions.'[9] Moreover there is still the danger posed by the French: that they may explore and perhaps take

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[7] Page numbers in brackets refer to the 2nd edition published in 1836. The 1st edition was published in London by Hurst Chance in 1830. Maslen reveals in the Appendix that his book was written in the autumn of 1827 but publication was delayed because of the 'indifference' of the public; the discovery of the Darling River having confirmed some of his predictions, he had been encouraged to proceed with publication.
[8] A chapter is devoted to the 'Treatment of hostile Indians' (Ch VI), with advice on how to frighten them away, preferably without having to kill them, since it is the Europeans' duty as the representative of civilisation to seek to avoid unnecessary bloodshed.
[9] 'From a European point of view, Australia was one of the last sites for speculation, one of the last places yet to be known. It was seen to be one of the last untilled tracts in the field of knowledge' (Gibson 1992: 6).

possession of parts of the country (2). However an important reason is a social one: Maslen believes that exploration will open up the country to continuing expansion and settlement, extending the 'thriving colony' of New South Wales. He, like Wakefield, is very much in favour of the migration of free settlers: Australia offers the opportunity for Britain's poor to make a new life, at no loss to the mother country where there is no work for them since the return of peace. Government and local authorities should help 'our willing enterprising poor' (4) through heavily subsidised or free transport - this assisted migration will be of benefit to the British populations, by reducing competition for work, and to the local authorities who will have fewer unemployed and destitute to support, and it will supply labour for the colonies (233). The moral benefits of this scheme will also be considerable, for poverty leads many young men in Britain to 'prefer a life of libertinage to that of marrying' (6) with the consequent numbers of illegitimate children.

His plans for exploration involve then a much broader aim: the construction of an ideal society on the 'empty' land of Australia. Australia is described in the opening pages as an 'uninhabited' country (2), a 'wilderness' (xii), although later chapters deal at length with the aborigines and in the Appendix he accepts that there are good grounds for believing in the existence of a 'numerous population of Indians' in the interior (377).[10] It is in the context of his social aims that we need to analyse his speculative map of the continent. His optimistic assessment of the continent's material promise is an incitement to take possession of it and an encouragement to settle there. His speculative geography thus involves an idealised portrayal of the geography and topography that emphasises the fertility of the soils, the clemency of the climate, the comparative ease of exploration, the lack of hostility of the natives. Eastern Australia he writes, from his house on the Yorkshire moors, is 'without any exaggeration or stretch of truth, the Paradise of the southern hemisphere' (313).

Maslen's map shows extensive and accurate detail around the coast of Australia but considerable imaginative construction in the centre, where he promises water and fertile soils. He is persuaded that there must exist a great river, flowing through the centre of

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[10] He often, as in this passage, refers to the aborigines as 'Indians,' referring not to the Indians with which he was familiar but to those of North America: 'The term Indians, as used in North America, seems most suitable, because, to call people Blacks who are not black, is improper, many being fair, and all being brown. To call them savages is a libel on the quiet tribes' (132, footnote).

the continent into the ocean off the North West coast of Australia.[11] His map shows therefore at the heart of the continent, the delta and the route of a 'beautiful' river 'of the first magnitude.' A navigable river must exist, he insists, not only because of the analogy with other continents but because: 'It is impossible to contemplate the works of a Bounteous Creator and believe that any imperfection can exist on the face of our planet; which would certainly be the case if such a continent had no outlet for its waters' (136). He also shows on his map purely fanciful ranges of mountains in the western half of the continent, and supposes that beyond the first hundred or so miles from the West Australian coast, the country becomes rich and fertile (49).

Maslen's recommendation of the principles to be used in choosing place names may also be seen to reflect a utopian impulse, a desire to ground its unique identity: 'Let Australia have a nomenclature of her own' (256). He explains that he is strongly opposed to the practice of naming new places after old ones. It is 'absurd,' he writes, to use European names in new colonies, with the result that there are so many Windsors, Richmonds, etc. now dotted across the empire. He proposes that aboriginal names should be used where possible (254) and in default of an 'Indian' name, recourse should be made to the list of places situated at the equivalent northern latitude, in order to 'ascertain what remarkable place is situated on the precise corresponding latitude' (255). If even this does not offer a solution, then the names of European individuals of note can be used, but only if they are not already in use for places in Europe. His own practice in naming is rather more ambiguous than this injunction might lead the reader to expect: in naming the large divisions of the continent he is in part content to accept existing practice, with some rationalisation. However, while he uses the neutral terms 'Western' and 'Eastern' Australia in place of New Holland and New South Wales, in pursuance of his aim to eliminate European references, for the north he invents 'Australindia,' and for the south 'Anglicania.' He does not explain his choice of these latter terms, but perhaps they refer to the distribution of population, the north of Australia still being largely populated by 'Indians' alone, the south already undergoing colonisation by whites. But another explanation for the choice of 'Australindia' may lie

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[11] Michael Cathcart (2009: 102–4) argues that the widespread belief that early explorers were searching for an inland sea is a myth; the majority believed or hoped that they would find a river. Maslen vacillated over whether a river or a sea might be found in the heart of Australia, but returned in the second edition of his book in 1836 to his initial assumption that a great river would be discovered there.
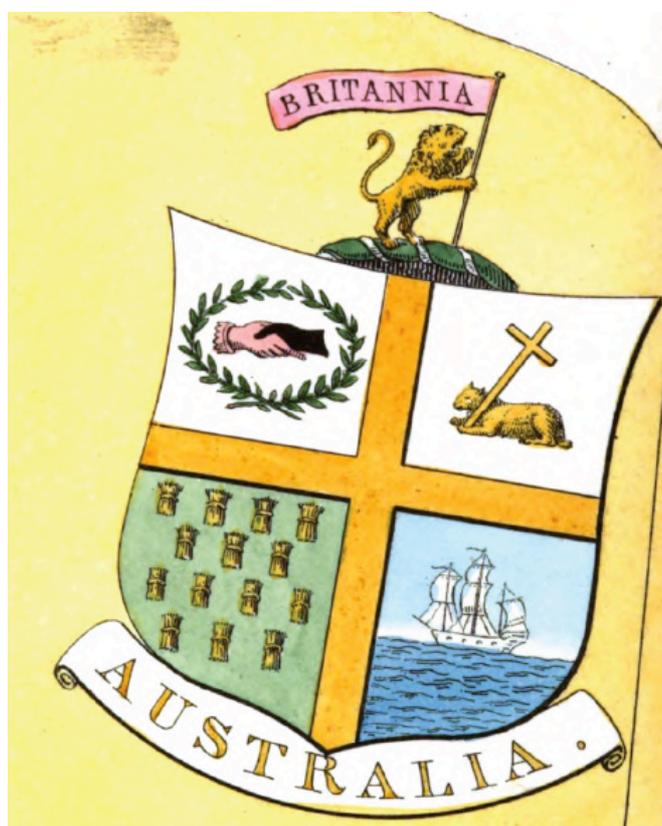
Thomas J. Maslen, *Sketch of the Coasts of Australia and the Supposed Entrance of the Great River …
1831*.[12]

in his assumption that the northern interior of Australia 'will be found to be a second
India' (379). The choice of 'Anglicania' stakes a claim and perhaps assigns a religious
identity.

His detailed plans for the new colony extend to the suggestion that Australia might one
day have its own coat of arms and flag and he provides a colour plate representation of
what the flag might be, almost certainly the first flag ever designed for Australia, and
designed at a time when the concept of a politically and administratively united
Australia lay far in the future. We can perhaps explain Maslen's ability to conceive of
Australia in this way as the result of his cartographic labours: his representation of the

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[12] *Sketch of the Coasts of Australia and the Supposed Entrance of the Great River …1831*, T. J. Maslen,
fecit. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW. Call no. M2 804/1831/1. Digital order no. a128149. Link
to record and online image:
http://library.sl.nsw.gov.au/search~S2/?searchtype=c&searcharg=m2+804%2F1831%2F1&searchscope=
2&sortdropdown=-
&SORT=D&extended=0&searchlimits=&searchorigarg=aMaslen%2C+T.+J.+%28Thomas+J.%29.

continent, which includes the tributaries of the 'great river' stretching out across the land and binding it together, creates the conceptual framework necessary to imagine it as a whole. The flag, against a yellow background,[13] displays Britannia written on a standard brandished by a rearing lion at the top, with Australia written in much larger characters across the bottom. In the shape of a crest, it is divided into four squares showing top right a lamb bearing a cross; below, a ship at sea ('the emblem of commerce'); bottom left, 14 wheat sheaves ('the emblem of agriculture and plenty') and at top left, in the most prominent position, a black and a white hand grasped in a handshake, encircled by palm-leaves, an 'emblem of goodwill between white men and their sable fellow creatures' (427). The flag is utopian: it represents a country at peace with its native inhabitants, a Christian land, and a land of plenty.

Thomas J. Maslen, 'A Colonial Flag,' 1830.[14]

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[13] In a hand-written addition to the 1836 edition of the work (reproduced in several copies we have seen), Maslen explains that he has chosen yellow, the imperial colour of China, in order to symbolise that Australia too will become a great imperial power in the region.

[14] 'A Colonial Flag,' in *The Friend of Australia, or, A Plan for Exploring the Interior ... of Australia by a Retired Officer of the Hon. East India Company's Service*, Thomas J. Maslen, 1830. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW. Call no. ML 980.1/58A3 Pl.5. Digital order no. a128149.Link to record and online images:
http://library.sl.nsw.gov.au/search~S2?/aMaslen%2C+T.+J.+%28Thomas+J.%29/amaslen+t+j+thomas+j/
-3%2C-1%2C0%2CB/frameset&FF=amaslen+t+j+thomas+j&3%2C%2C5.

This pictorial representation of the relationship between Europeans and Aborigines is belied by Maslen's proposal to solve the 'Tasmanian problem' by turning Tasmania into an all-white colony, transferring the natives to uninhabited islands or other parts of the continent and 'for the future not to allow any other than a white population to habit Tasmania, which would then be a second England, and of course the bulwark of all the British settlements in the Southern Hemisphere' (241). This policy was indeed carried out by George Robinson in the early 1830s.[15] Moreover Maslen is possibly the first writer to call explicitly for a White Australia: he enjoins Australians not to 'import strangers of all languages, colours and creeds'—'speaking as an Australian of the year two thousand, my boast should be, 'we are of a pure white stock; we are no mongrels'' (313). The concept of a 'White Australia' is in itself utopian—the ideal of a 'pure' race is not only unrealisable but also assumes, as Maslen makes clear, the imminent demise of the aborigines.[16]

Maslen draws up not only a map to encourage exploration, not only a flag for the new colony, but town plans to construct the ideal settlement. Michael Williams points out that a number of reformers with utopian ideas for town planning were active in the early nineteenth century, seeking to discover, whether at home or overseas in the colonies, the 'ideal settlement form,' that might promote 'the health and happiness of the greatest number.'[17] Maslen certainly belongs to this current of thought since he devotes half a chapter and a detailed plan to explain his proposals for the lay-out of an ideal Australian city (chapter XIII)—perhaps the first published town plan for the continent.[18] Maslen can be held to have introduced the idea of a green-belt around Australian towns: 'a belt of park about a mile or two in diameter should entirely surround every town' (263); this

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[15] By 1833, George Augustus Robinson had persuaded the approximately 300 surviving Tasmanian Aborigines to surrender, with assurances that they would be protected and provided for. They were transferred to Flinders Island where most of them perished. On other issues too, Maslen seems to presciently announce some later policies: in Chapter XIII 'Civilising the Indians should begin with their children', Maslen argues that they should be taken from their parents and community when young and sent to Madras, to be educated with children of 'their own colour but very different in manners' (244–45). Some, trained as teachers, would return to their communities to educate the next generation.
Another plan is to buy the female children (the Indians are 'not over affectionate to their female children' 242) and train them to be wives for the convicts (243), a plan that would, of course, rapidly 'breed out' the aborigines.
[16] Some critics have argued for the link between utopianism and racism, see for example Wetz (2003).
[17] Michael Williams (1966: 67–69) speculates that proposals from Maslen, Robert Owen and John Sinclair may have influenced the design of Adelaide.
[18] In 1843 he wrote a book on improvements to town planning in Britain and the colonies, *Suggestions for the Improvement of Our Towns and Houses*. This book includes the section from *Friend of Australia* on town planning.

would contribute to the health of the inhabitants and their physical and aesthetic pleasure. But he offers far more detail than this, suggesting a grid pattern for the town, with the widest streets, for the better-off, at the centre, then narrower streets extending further out.[19] Narrow lanes and alleys must be eliminated altogether from the centre of towns for 'they are the hiding places of thieves, the abodes of misery, the manufactories of every species of vice and wickedness' (264). His city is class and hierarchically based, but is designed to keep the classes separate as much as possible, physically and even visually, to reduce the resentment that the poor might feel towards the rich when confronted with the evidence of their wealth (269). Maslen goes beyond Wakefield in proposing not merely to preserve the classes of workers and landed gentry, but in setting out the criteria for the creation of an aristocracy based on the possession of land (324).
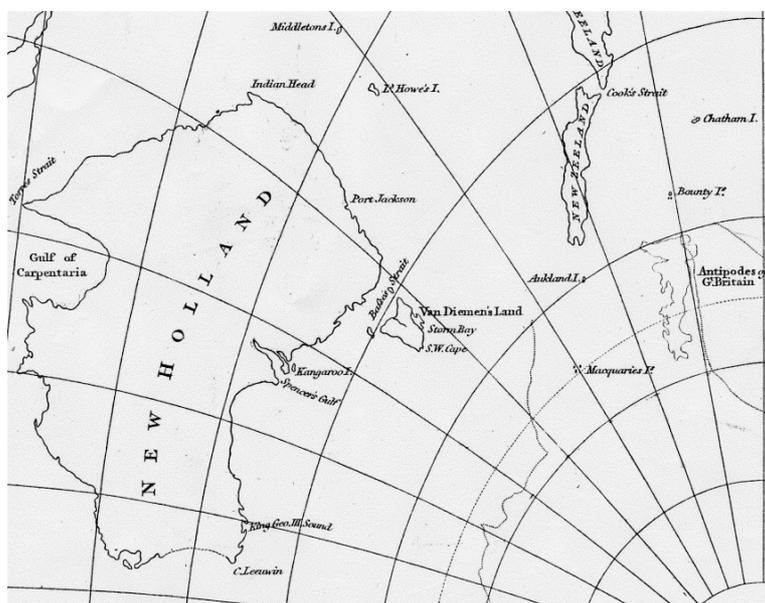
James Vetch: Mapping the 'Great Hiatus.'

Captain James Vetch, an engineer and a cartographer by vocation, was a Fellow of the Royal Society and a founding Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. His principle contribution to early nineteenth century knowledge of the Australian continent was a paper published in 1838 in the Society's Journal entitled *Considerations on the Political Geography and Geographical Nomenclature of Australia* (1838a), which discussed not so much Australia as it then was, but as it might be once the exploration of the interior was completed and a systematic colonization of the continent begun. Vetch's utopian vision takes the form of a territorial division of Australian space which is explicitly political and implicitly social. Like Maslen, Vetch had never visited Australia. His knowledge of Australia's geography came from early reports of exploration to the Royal Geographical Society, but primarily from 'study of the map' (159) and calculus. There is no evidence that Vetch belonged to the National Colonization Society and his 1838 blueprint for Australia seems to have been independent of the Wakefield-inspired lobby for systematic colonization; unlike Maslen, he never dedicated a book-length study to the continent. However, he did publish numerous papers and reports on geology, antiquities, geography, navigation and engineering; notably in 1843 a plan to build a canal across the Isthmus of Suez which anticipated and partly inspired Ferdinand de Lesseps' later project. While the *Considerations* is the sole publication he devoted exclusively to Australia, it invites comparison with an earlier paper he presented to the

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[19] He gives Greek names to the wide streets at the centre of town for the better off: Corinthian, Ionic, Doric, and Mauresque for the narrow streets for the poor, on the outskirts.

Royal Geographical Society: *On the Monuments and Relics of the Ancient Inhabitants of New Spain* (1837).

His first map to represent Australia is a mappemonde entitled *Projection of the Globe on the Cylinder of a Meridian* and its accompanying Memoir, published between 1821 and 1825, which adopts a variation on the Mercator projection of the world known as a transverse Mercator perspective where the polar regions (absent on a conventional Mercator) are drawn towards the centre of the map, enhancing the parts of the world in the vicinity of the poles, such as Australasia, which have been 'unreasonably neglected' (Vetch 1825: 1). It shrinks the tyranny of distance by linking Europe and Australia along a north-south maritime meridian arcing through the then still-to-be-charted Antarctic continent, while at the same time suggesting the proximity of the new world geographies of the American and Australian continents. It also inscribes the utopia of a new Britain in the South Seas by tracing the holographic, upside-down figure of the British Isles off the south coast of New Zealand at an equivalent latitude to its position in the northern hemisphere. Two zones in each hemisphere between the latitudes 50°

Detail of James Vetch's 'Projection of the Globe on the Cylinder of a Meridian,'
c.1831, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.[20]

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[20] There are only two extant copies of James Vetch's *mappemonde*: the British Library copy is dated circa 1820, while the version held by the Bibliothèque Nationale de France is circa 1831. The *mappemonde* was accompanied by an explanatory memoir that the British Library dates as circa 1825. If the latter date seems the more reasonable, Vetch would have drawn the *mappemonde* while on working leave from the Ordnance Survey in Mexico (from 1824 to 1835), where he surveyed previously unmapped regions of the country.

and 55° are marked in red, establishing 'the latitude of England' as a standard where the same environmental conditions are expected to prevail at opposite ends of the earth.
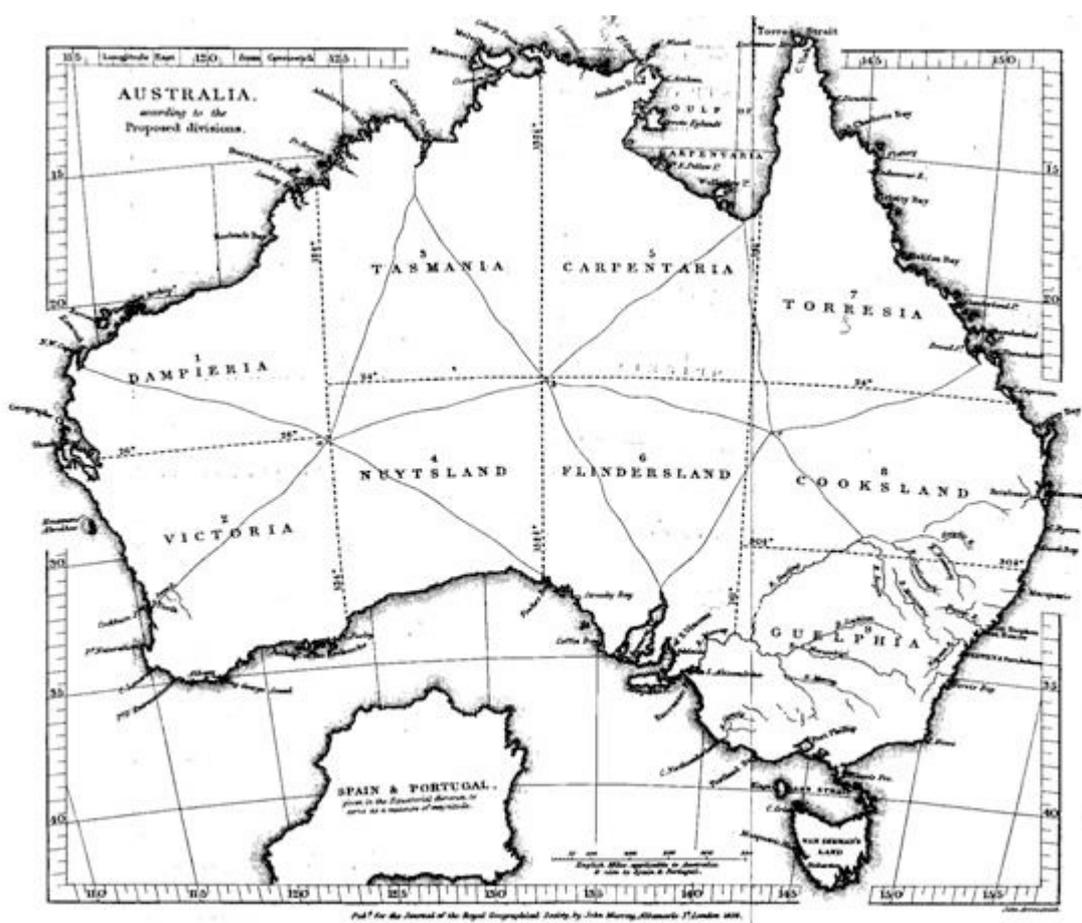
Finding promotion slow in peacetime, Vetch had taken leave of his regiment to become a manager for Anglo-Mexican mining interests. He lived in Mexico from 1824–1829 and returned to work there as a surveyor and engineer from 1832–1835. In the course of his travels in Mexico, Vetch gathered a substantial collection of pre-Columbian antiquities, which he later gifted to the British Museum and mapped broad swathes of the country. His subsequent writing on Australia alludes repeatedly to the Americas in general and to Central America in particular, so that he tends to read Australian space and its indigenous peoples through the lens of his Mexican experience. In so doing, Vetch displays an epistemological trait also apparent in Maslen's work: his understanding of Australian space draws on analogical reasoning which projects the environment and topography of the Americas (or India for Maslen) onto the island continent, in an inter-colonial transposition of experience. As in continental America, he supposes that the frontier will be opened up and domesticated by horses and mules (1838a: 165).

Utopian systems and surveys

Vetch's premise is that Australia, as a new world, provides a unique opportunity to draw up a scheme of political division while the territory is still an unknown quantity (in 1838a) beyond the boundaries of the fledgling settlements of New South Wales, Van Diemen's Land, the Swan River colony, Victoria and South Australia. Like Wakefield or Maslen, 'system' is the key word: the blank map of the interior—the 'great hiatus' as Vetch calls it—invites geographical projection and systematic survey on a grand scale. He observes that territorial divisions are generally the result of historical accident and are capricious in their outcomes with detrimental effect on 'the laws, the peace and prosperity of the people.' On his map, in contrast, 'political divisions (are based) on principle and system' (157); the (near) perfect symmetry of his territorial divisions, which sought to ensure equality of natural advantage, access to the coast, and size, will foster 'general peace and individual prosperity' (158). For Vetch, the great 'empty' continent is a land of unbounded opportunity: where in the old world, political organisation followed discovery and settlement, in the New it will precede it. Indeed 'the plan should be adopted and reduced to practice ere conditions or circumstances

may arise to render the same either impracticable or difficult' (159). In other words, before discovery disrupts the perfect symmetry of theory.

In Vetch's geography, nature imitates science. The continent is a geometrical form, oblong in shape, twice the length of its breadth. The author laments the creation of the colony of South Australia (159), which alone disrupts its natural symmetry. The territories are to be of equal area, compact and self-contained, each with access to the sea. Accordingly, he maps the land by halving it longitudinally and slicing the resultant moieties transversely into four equal parts, creating nine divisions (with a further state, Guelphia (today's Victoria), squeezed into the south-eastern corner of the continent), to make ten provinces overall including Van Diemen's Land. A larger or smaller number of divisions 'would not be likely to ensure so good a government or so much happiness to the people' (159). Each division is 1/4th larger than Spain and Portugal combined: like the British Isles in Vetch's earlier *mappemonde*, the Iberian peninsula is transposed

James Vetch's Map of Australia, 1838, from his 'Considerations on the Political Geography and Geographical Nomenclature of Australia,' *Royal Geographical Society Journal*, vol. 8 (1838): 157–69.

holographically to the Great Australian Bight as a measure of scale. Demography is predicated upon the symmetry of space, with each sub-division to accommodate a peak population of 19 million inhabitants (proportional to the then population of the Iberian peninsula). Extrapolating from the European experience to a new world the size of continental Europe, Vetch predicts that one day the population of Australia will match the demographic potential of the USA: 'if we reckon the population of Europe at 186,000,000 Australia may at a future day, on the same scale of density, possess a population of 153,000,000' (158). Vetch's *Considerations* are at their most utopian in the conformity of territorial and demographic outcomes to mathematical principle and rational expectations.

Like Wakefield, the declared purpose of Vetch's scheme of division is to facilitate the allotment of title (160), in what is *ab origine* a vacant plot, a no man's land or waste land. Unlike Maslen, Vetch does not believe that an inland river or sea lies waiting to be discovered in the heart of the continent,[21] but he half-expects interior exploration to uncover the relics of decayed civilisations, by analogy with the Aztec ruins in Mexico (165). He expresses surprise that, in spite of its proximity to India and China, or Java (167), and new world analogies with distant Peru and Mexico (168), the Australian continent has yet to reveal any trace of an ancient civilisation and speculates that a natural barrier may once have isolated the Australian continent, or a cataclysmic event may have destroyed both the cities and their makers. One of the purposes of systematic exploration is to uncover the evidence of their presence 'for we are still allowed to expect in the interior traces and proofs of the ancient dominion of civilised nations' (168).

Vetch's speculative geography

A recurrent term in Vetch's vocabulary is 'conjecture' (1838a: 165, 168) and the related semantic field of supposition and inference. Faced with the lack of verifiable knowledge of the Australian interior, *conjecture* is adopted as a legitimate epistemological tool of enquiry. In so doing, Vetch followed to the letter principles enunciated by the founders of the Royal Geographical Society in their instructions to geographers. To project conjectural figures onto the uncharted interior, to fill 'the great hiatus' with imagined geographies, to posit inland rivers (Maslen) or ancient civilisations (Vetch), far from

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[21] 'in a continent like Australia, without inlets of the sea and great navigable rivers' (165).

being unscientific, is to advance working hypotheses in the cause of discovery. Given the continent's position on the globe, it seems reasonable to deduce that the climate is temperate—'the general climate is so mild' (165)—the terrain hospitable. 'The genial climate and thinly-peopled tracts of Australia' are judged to be more attractive than the frozen shores of North America (165). In Australia, the ground requires less clearing than in America; 'the country is generally free from thickets and dense forests' (166), open and transitable; travel into the interior will be easy by foot, on horseback, or by carriage. In these conditions, horses will flourish (166) and become the main means of transport, as in Central America.

With the geometrical precision of the engineer, Vetch proposes a framework for verifying his speculative geography. Three outposts, or staging posts of exploration, are to be established in the interior, each 500 miles from the nearest sea-coast (166). These equidistant 'inland points of appui' are terrestrial variants of the British Admiralty's harbours of refuge which Vetch would be appointed to oversee later in his career. Indeed, in his correspondence with the Journal's editor he describes them as 'Ports in the Interior' (Vetch 1838b: 1). They are lettered a, b and c, and they overlay the map in a triangular grid pattern (1838a: 165), allowing the geographer to operate a triangulation of the territory (166) with a fourfold objective: 1) to take possession of the country and acquire knowledge of its natural resources; 2) to provide a place of refuge and resupply for exploration; 3) to acquire information about the natives and control them by 'bridling (their) numbers and power'; (166) and 4) to check the movements of Europeans (convicts, subversives, or colonial rivals). Among potential rivals, the threat of France (while never made explicit) looms large and with it the fear that 'some rival nation, establishing a colony on the shore, shall push on discoveries of the interior' (167). To counter that threat, the inland outposts are to provide a modicum of territorial government.

For Vetch, the equilateral division of the territory and the general principle of equilibration seen in his mapping of the continent are synonymous with political equality and a guarantee of good governance. His concern with territorial reform as a check upon the monopoly of the landowning interest in the British parliamentary system and a curative for the abuses of rotten boroughs can be traced back to a radical pamphlet he authored in 1831 during the debate over the Great Reform Bill (Vetch 1831). Finding

no audience for his comprehensive plan of legislative devolution for the British Isles, he would later reformulate and project its geopolitical framework onto the blank map of the Australian continent, prefiguring the idea that Australia is a laboratory for social and democratic reform.

In place of knowledge or understanding of the first peoples, Vetch adopts a nominalist strategy, or a native name protocol, in imitation of the Spanish colonists in the Americas (162), whereby aboriginal place-names should be preserved for 'the sacredness of antiquity' (161). However, he recommends that the nomenclature of the greater divisions—the provinces or colonies—should be modern, because as 'the circumscribed knowledge and power of the present native races cannot be supposed to reach, or to have any motive for reaching, to so great a grouping of land (162), there is no native name for the whole of Australia. The principles for determining nomenclature are to be discovery, antiquity and novelty (163), by order of preference, so that of the ten provinces eight are named after navigators, and two after British sovereigns (George III and Victoria, patron of the Royal Geographical Society), but none after the first peoples. Vetch's choice of names, which recognises the contributions of European explorers of different nationalities to the 'discovery' of Australia, implies the existence of a common, collaborative European enlightenment project to extend the boundaries of science and knowledge, a description that can also be described as utopian.

Conclusion

As Pierre Jourde notes, utopias are often situated on islands, where the natural maritime frontiers allow for a homogeneous, self-contained society to be conceived and maintained: 'La forme la plus simple, et l'une des plus répandues des mondes imaginaires, en particulier des utopies (notamment More et Campanella) est *l'ile*, dont la planète dans le récit de science fiction peut dans une certaine mesure être considérée comme un avatar' (1991: 20).[22] Australia offers such a closed world—isolated and surrounded in the European imagination by uncharted seas and foreign and even savage societies. The maps of Vetch and Maslen do not include the continent's immediate geographic surroundings but, in so far as the authors seek to situate and represent the continent on the globe, they endeavour to demonstrate that Australia is closer to Britain

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[22] 'The simplest and one of the most widespread forms of imaginary worlds, and in particular of utopias (those of More and Campanella notably) is *the island*. The planet in science fiction stories can be considered to some extent as an avatar of the island.'

than is generally imagined, through manipulation of the *mappemonde*, in Vetch's case, or through metaphor and anecdote in Wakefield's.[23] Their utopian imagination thus extends to include Britain in a close and mutually beneficial relationship with the new continent, as both gain from the transfer of population and the growth of commerce. This article has explored the role of cartography, nomenclature and iconography as tools of the ambition to build a 'new world,' one based, their authors claimed, on rational principles. Dividing up the continent along scientific lines, using geometrical tools or mathematical formulae; speculating on the topographical features, natural advantages and divinely bestowed 'blessings' of the continent; planning the distribution of the European settlers uniformly and rationally across this 'uninhabited' country to produce a certain form of social relationships; predicting the huge population it could support … these authors provided an incentive to exploration and settlement, projects for social reform and a framework for the European imagination, making the unknown familiar before ever a European had set foot in the 'great hiatus.' These aspects of their work— the cartographic, the colonial and the utopian—are inextricably linked: their utopias were of course concerned with European problems, they ignored the native populations as if they did not exist, or assumed they would not exist for much longer, where they did not actively put forward proposals for eliminating them. The utopian dimension of their speculative geographies, which sought to realise the most perfect form of British civilisation—although each had his own version of what that form might be—provided an implicit justification for the takeover of a continent whose destiny it was to serve as the field of its construction.

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[23] In his *Letter from Sydney*, Wakefield conjures up the idea of a bridge linking Britain and her colonies.

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